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Suggestions for the Annual Church Meeting

BY REV. SAMUEL W. DIKE, LL. D.

Let me venture one or two suggestions in view of the annual church meetings now being held. These, with their social reunion, their review of the work of the year, and their election of officers and appointment of committees are proving most valuable. But cannot their value be increased?

For instance, may not the pastor more generally be expected to go beyond the ordinary statistics of members received, persons baptized, pastoral visits made and give some survey of his most important work in pulpit and prayer meeting? If pastor and people should review this work annually further interest would be aroused. Some intelligent summary of this kind would make clearer the real work of the year.

Then the reports of the societies and committees may well lead to some careful analysis and comparisons, perhaps at some later meeting, of the work done and that which needs special attention in the future. These studies could be referred to the appropriate committees and societies and become the basis, with the suggestions which they should earnestly invite, of various recommendations for adoption in the coming year. In seeking the counsel of the pastor, the deacons and other proper officers of the church and of the church itself, the several agencies of the church would not only get more light upon their duties but they would enlist the sympathy and co-operation of the church as a whole.

If we will stop to think of it, it will soon be apparent that the annual reports of committees and societies are frequently the first official recognition which the church has had during the whole year of their operations, if not of the very existence of some of them. They do not come to the church itself officially until they render account of their year's work. The pastor may know their plans and their work, but the church hears of them only when the report of results is given at the end. The superintendent of the Sunday school, the presidents of one or two of the societies may be members of a standing committee, but that is all. To a large degree the church is content to profit by the results of work that is done for it and in its name, but in whose initiation and general direction it has no official part except indirectly through its pastor. Those who do the work and those who only hear about it after it is all done are too often widely separated classes.

Here is the root of a difficulty of which some of the leaders of the young people's societies have complained of late—the lack of activity in church work among the graduates from these societies. The difficulty is largely due to the fact that these societies have never been taken into the church itself and made a responsible part of it. Like many others, they have worked for the church and in its name and have loyally turned over the product of their labors to the church. But they have not, as a rule, been led to derive their organization, direction and plans in any considerable degree from the church which they serve. Consultation with the pastor, if he is interested, has been as far as many have gone.

What we need in all our societies and committees is to make their connection with the church in the beginning and continuation of the work of the year as close and direct as it is at the end.

The allied societies should be more than allies. They should be treated in all respects as a part of the church itself, having all its privileges and responsibilities. Let the church as a whole take as much pains to hear and enter into plans and their development as it now does to learn about results, and we shall have still more to report at the end of the ecclesiastical year. If the committees and officers of the societies and those of the church should sit down and study their work together, counsel with each other and with the church frequently in official ways, a new interest in the common work, a deeper sympathy and increased enthusiasm would be sure to follow. Growing up in close relation with their elders the young people would know their methods and be in sympathy with their aims. They would find a new appreciation of their work.

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